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# FULFILLMENT

AFTER A BATTLE: 1916.

BY WILLIAM ALEXANDER PERCY

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And so the songs must go unsung,  
The dreams be only dreams. . . .  
But I have died for France! There is no fate  
So worthy them her august blood endues. . . .  
When all is said, what is the poet's life?  
The vulture's ebb between sky ecstasy  
And carrion of earth! Raptured, superb,  
He wheels against the sun, then falls  
And battens on the refuse beasts refuse!  
Somewhere i' the compound, rainbow-stuff  
And sunset-cloud and green-winged spray,  
There creeps the taint, the particle of earth,  
That marks it with the black of madness, sin, or quirk.  
Only the great are phoenix of the sun,  
Unfathered save of flame and dizzy light;  
They only keep, unpausingly and pure,  
The blue enfeoffments of their gorgeous sire.

Say I had lived; which height had I attained?  
The vulture's? Or the phoenix' flaming zone?  
Death makes all questions foolish now. . . .  
Yet in my soul I know there was a thing in me  
Of most immortal lineaments,  
Whose speech was beauty and whose thought was  
prayer! . . .

But even so, a year, a hundred years,  
A thousand—the loveliest words of men  
Are leaves with but a redder tint to time.  
The singers pass; the song endures: I die;  
But somewhere will gush up the crimson fire  
That lit my heart to songs I might not sing.

And there was France to die for! A splendor's there  
Beyond the dimming of eternity!

Who would be singer now, not soldier, who  
Would live for Fame when he could die for France,  
Fame, too, I must believe, will scorn as bastard. . . .  
She had no need of songs who asked my life.

Songs! Here was a deed to do  
More gracious and more splendid than all songs!

And I have done that deed;

And I am well content.

WILLIAM ALEXANDER PERCY.